

Friday's Gospel: Sharing in God's Forgiveness

Gospel for Friday in the 7th
Week of Easter, and
commentary.

Gospel (*Jn* 21:15-19)

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my

sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.” (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Commentary

After our Lord's resurrection, we can imagine Saint Peter's heart being

filled with conflicting emotions. On the one hand, the indescribable joy of having his Lord with them again after seeing him suffer the unspeakable torments from Gethsemane to Golgotha; on the other, the enormous inner remorse for his triple denial during the interrogation in the high priest's palace.

From the first appearance of the Risen Jesus, Simon Peter would have had a tremendous desire to be alone with our Lord and explain what had happened and ask for forgiveness. He knew that Jesus would forgive him because Peter had seen Jesus doing so many times already. Furthermore, during the Last Supper Jesus had even announced to him what was going to happen.

But that encounter had not yet occurred, and Saint Peter would have been longing for it to arrive. Now,

finally, Jesus takes Simon aside and they have the wonderful dialogue that today's Gospel passage recounts.

Jesus, with his distinctive pedagogy that is so divine and so human at the same time, takes the lead and asks him a question that he repeats twice: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Our Lord, with his triple insistence, is reminding Peter of his triple denial. But he does so in a way that allows Peter to recognize the gravity of his sin and, at the same time, to realize how deeply he is loved by God.

There is no room for blame, nor for bitterness, nor for a possible loss of trust. Quite the opposite: it is a forgiveness that not only heals the wound and cleanses the stain of sin, but also regenerates, strengthens, and gives divine Life so that Peter can share it with others.

This is what God's forgiveness is like, which we too want to share in, both by receiving it and offering it to others.

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